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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: OVIP (SHULTZ, GEORGE P.)
SUBJECT: ESTIMATE OF FATALITIES AT CHERNOBYL REACTOR ACCIDENT

INFORMATION MEMO (S/S 8613863)

TO : THE SECRETARY

FROM : INR - MORTON I. ABRAMOWITZ

SUBJECT: SPECULATIVE ESTIMATE OF FATALITIES AT CHERNOBYL REACTOR ACCIDENT

1. THE ENTIRE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY BELIEVES A FATALITY FIGURE OF TWO IS PREPOSTEROUS.

2. A NORMAL DAY SHIFT AT AN INDIVIDUAL SOVIET RBMK-1000

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POWER REACTOR IS REPORTED TO BE AROUND 100 PEOPLE; A NIGHT SHIFT WOULD BE 25-35 PEOPLE. THIS WOULD MEAN THAT' BECAUSE UNIT 3 AND 4 ARE ADJACENT, AS MANY AS 200 PEOPLE IN THE DAYTIME OR 50-70 PEOPLE AT NIGHT COULD HAVE BEEN WORKING IN THE VICINITY OF REACTOR UNIT 4 WHEN THE ACCIDENT BEGAN. WHILE WE WOULD EXPECT THAT AN IMMEDIATE EVACUATION WAS ORDERED WHEN THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ACCIDENT BECAME APPARENT, STILL A FAIRLY LARGE CREW (COMPARED TO US REACTOR OPERATIONS) WOULD BE EXPECTED TO REMAIN TO CARRY OUT EMERGENCY PROCEDURES IN AN ATTEMPT TO SHUT DOWN THE REACTOR AND TO SOLVE WHATEVER PROBLEM MAY HAVE CAUSED THE ACCIDENT. THIS CREW WOULD BE A "FORLORN HOPE," KEPT AT THE SITE IN ORDER TO RECTIFY THE PROBLEM, BUT WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY WOULD BE LOST SHOULD THE PROBLEM WORSEN DRAMATICALLY. THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO THIS WOULD BE TO ABANDON THE SITE IMMEDIATELY AT THE SIGN OF MAJOR PROBLEMS, WHICH WOULD VIRTUALLY INSURE THE SORT OF DISASTER THAT ULTIMATELY OCCURED.

3. IF THE ACCIDENT SITUATION LASTED FOR ANY AMOUNT OF TIME WE WOULD EXPECT THE EMERGENCY CREW TO BE AUGMENTED AS THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION BECAME KNOWN. SHIFT SUPERVISORS AND FOREMEN FROM THE OTHER UNITS WOULD BE CALLED IN TO MAKE SURE THAT APPROPRIATE ACTIONS WERE BEING TAKEN TO HEAD OFF ANY POTENTIAL CATASTROPHE. IMAGERY SHOWING FIRE ENGINES AND EMERGENCY VEHICLES NEAR THE REACTORS SUPPORTS THE SUPPOSITION THAT ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL WERE RESPONDING TO THE ACCIDENT. THEY COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN BROUGHT IN BEFORE ANY EXPLOSION. BASED ON NUMBERS OF VEHICLES IN THE AREA AND POSTULATING AN AUGMENTED EMERGENCY CREW, AS MUCH AS 100 PEOPLE COULD HAVE BEEN IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THE REACTOR WHEN A MAJOR STEAM/GAS EXPLOSION OCCURRED, RIPPING OPEN THE REACTOR BUILDING AND CAUSING MAJOR STRUCTURAL DAMAGE.

4. BECAUSE OF THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE OBSERVED ON IMAGERY OF THE SITE, WE FEEL THAT ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THE UNIT 4 EXPLOSION WERE EITHER KILLED OR SUFFERED LETHAL RADIATION DOSES AT THE TIME OF THE EXPLOSION' THE FAILURE OF THE SOVIETS TO EVACUATE THE FIRE ENGINES FROM THE LETHAL RADIATION ZONE AROUND

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THE DESTROYED REACTOR BUILDING IS ANOTHER INDICATION OF
FATALITIES' (SECRET/NOFORN) WHITEHEAD

END OF MESSAGE SECRET